

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all previous listings and versions of claim in this application.

Claims 1. to 22. (Cancelled)

23. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a food product dispenser comprising:

dispensing servings of a food or food component from a food delivery mechanism along a dispensing path;

directing a cleansing fluid along a cleansing fluid path which is operably associated with the food delivery mechanism to conduct a cleansing operation on at least a portion of the dispensing path;

rinsing the at least a portion of the dispensing path after the cleansing operation to remove cleansing fluid therefrom;

directing hot water to the at least a portion of the dispensing path to conduct a sanitizing operation, wherein the water is sufficiently hot to reduce microbiological deposits and the sanitizing operation occurs non-concurrently with the cleansing operation and rinsing for sanitizing the at least a portion of the dispensing path, and wherein the hot water is at a temperature which is sufficient to sanitize the at least a portion of the dispensing path; and

switching between the dispensing of the food or food component and conducting the cleansing and sanitizing operations at a plurality of time intervals.

Claims 24. to 28. (Cancelled)

29. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, wherein the sanitizing operation is conducted a plurality of times before the cleansing operation is conducted.

30. (Original) The method of claim 23, further comprising heating the cleansing fluid in the fluid path.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further including automatically determining with a controller device when one of the cleansing and sanitizing operations will begin and sending one of a cleansing start signal and a sanitizing start signal.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 31, wherein the cleansing start signal automatically starts the cleansing operation and wherein the sanitizing start signal automatically starts the sanitizing operation.

33. (Withdrawn - Previously Presented) The method of claim 31, wherein the cleansing start signal notifies an operator to activate the cleansing operation.

34. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 31, wherein the dispenser includes a source of cleansing fluid so that it is not necessary to connect an external source of cleansing fluid to perform the cleansing operation.

35. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, conducted by a controller in a food product dispenser comprising the food delivery mechanism, which mechanism comprises:

a food source configured for receiving a food or food component,

a food conduit associated with the food source for receiving the food or food component therefrom, and

a dispensing mechanism configured for dispensing servings of the food or food component from the conduit along the dispensing path; and

the dispenser includes a first mechanism comprising a cleansing conduit operably associated with the food delivery mechanism for directing the cleansing fluid along the cleansing fluid path in cleansing association with the food delivery mechanism under conditions for performing the cleansing operation on at least a portion of the dispensing path;

wherein the controller is operably associated with the first mechanism for activating the first mechanism at the intervals to cleanse the portion of the dispensing path automatically in response to predetermined conditions, and the controller, delivery mechanism and first mechanism are configured to switch between the dispensing of the servings and the cleansing operation.

36. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises configuring the first mechanism for conducting the cleansing operation without interrupting delivery of the product.

37. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 36, which further comprises providing the cleansing operation with a duration that is selected to interrupt the dispenser for between about 10 and about 20 minutes.

38. (Withdrawn - Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises providing the dispenser further with an operator annunciator, wherein the controller is operably associated with the annunciator to cause the annunciator to prompt an operator to activate the cleansing operation.

39. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises providing the dispenser with at least one of a timer and a sensor, the timer configured for timing intervals between cleansing operations, wherein the controller is associated with at least one of the timer and the sensor for activating the first mechanism based on information received from at least one of the timer and the sensor.

40. (Cancelled)

41. (Cancelled)

42. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises configuring the first mechanism for performing the cleansing and sanitizing operations.

43. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 42, which further comprises configuring the controller for automatically operating the first mechanism for selectively conducting one of the cleansing and sanitizing operations.

44. (Cancelled)

45. (Cancelled)

46. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 43, which further comprises configuring the controller is to conduct the sanitizing operation several times per day.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, which further comprises configuring the first mechanism to conduct the cleansing operation using a cleansing fluid selected from at least one of the group consisting of (i) a detergent, (ii) a caustic material, and (iii) an acid material, and the sanitizing operation using hot water.

48. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises configuring the dispenser to dispense product servings of a single serving to about 10 servings at one time wherein each product serving is sized for consumption by an individual.

49. (Cancelled)

50. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises configuring the first mechanism for recirculating the cleansing fluid through the cleansing fluid path.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, which further comprises providing the dispenser with a heating device configured to heat the cleansing fluid as the cleansing fluid is recirculated through the cleansing fluid path.

52. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, which further comprises providing the first mechanism with a reservoir in fluid communication with the cleansing fluid path configured to hold a volume of the cleansing fluid.

53. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises configuring the controller to activate the first mechanism at predetermined intervals for sanitizing a portion of the delivery mechanism.

54. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, which further comprises providing a dispenser housing that houses the food source, food conduit, dispensing mechanism and first mechanism.

55. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 53, wherein the dispenser includes a source of food product and a source of cleansing fluid so that it is unnecessary for an operator to connect an external source of food product or cleansing solution to perform a dispensing or cleansing operation.

56. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 35, wherein the first mechanism is operably associated with the food conduit and dispensing path and is configured to cleanse the food conduit and dispensing mechanism.

57. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, wherein the food product is a milk-based product and the sanitizing fluid is hot water having a temperature of between about 75°C and about 95°C.

58. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a food product dispenser comprising:

dispensing a food or food component product that is milk based from a food delivery mechanism along a dispensing path;

conducting a cleansing operation on at least a portion of the dispensing path by directing a cleansing fluid along a cleansing fluid path which is operatively associated with the food delivery mechanism and dispensing path;

conducting a sanitizing operation by directing hot water along the at least a portion of the dispensing path, wherein the hot water is at a temperature which is sufficiently hot to reduce

microbiological deposits and sanitize that portion of the dispensing path that has encountered the milk based product; and

switching between the dispensing of the food or food component and the conducting the cleansing operation at a plurality of intervals during a day automatically according to a time controlled cleansing program or upon request of an operator.

59. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 58, wherein the sanitizing fluid is hot water having a temperature between about 75° C and about 95° C.

60. (Currently amended) The method of claim 58, wherein the hot water has a temperature ~~above~~ between about 70° C and about 95° C and is directed along the fluid path at a velocity between about 0.2 to 2.0 m/s to cause flow along the fluid path and to sanitize the at least a portion of the dispensing path.

61. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 60, wherein the hot water is directed at intervals occurring once about every 10 minutes to about every 12 hours and with the interval including a fluid directing time period of between about 30 seconds and about 30 minutes during which period the dispensing of the food product is interrupted.

62. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a food product dispenser comprising:

dispensing servings of a food or food component from a food delivery mechanism along a dispensing path;

directing a cleansing fluid along a cleansing fluid path which is operably associated with the food delivery mechanism to conduct a first cleansing operation on at least a portion of the dispensing path;

directing cleansing fluid along a cleansing fluid path which is operably associated with the food delivery mechanism to conduct a second cleansing operation on the at least a portion of the dispensing path, wherein the second cleansing operation occurs a period of time after the first cleansing operation;

rinsing the at least a portion of the dispensing path to remove cleansing fluid therefrom;

directing hot water to at least a portion of the dispensing path to conduct at least one sanitizing operation during the period of time between the first and second cleansing operations, wherein the hot water is at a temperature which is sufficiently hot to reduce microbiological deposits and sanitize at least a portion of the dispensing path; and

switching between the dispensing of the food or food component and conducting the cleansing and sanitizing operations at a plurality of time intervals.

63. (Cancelled)

64. (Previously Presented) A method for operating a food product dispenser comprising:

dispensing servings of a food or food component from a food delivery mechanism along a dispensing path;

directing a cleansing fluid along a cleansing fluid path which is operably associated with the food delivery mechanism to conduct a cleansing operation on the at least a portion of the dispensing path, wherein at least a component of the cleansing fluid is stored in a container within the dispenser;

directing hot water to at least a portion of the dispensing path to conduct a sanitizing operation, wherein the hot water is at a temperature which is water is sufficiently hot to reduce microbiological deposits and sanitize at least a portion of the dispensing path; and

switching between the dispensing of the food or food component and conducting the cleansing and sanitizing operations at a plurality of time intervals.